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Outcomes of the in-depth reviews carried out by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Bureau

Outcomes of in-depth reviews carried out in 2007 - 2013

Prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

The document provides a summary of the outcomes of the in-depth reviews of selected statistical areas carried out by the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau in 2007-2013.

The Bureau discussed the outcomes of in-depth reviews in October 2013, and considered the in-depth review process of great value for the Conference of European Statisticians as it allows focusing the work on most topical areas and leads to tangible results. The Bureau carries out approximately three in-depth reviews each year, and selects one in-depth review topic for discussion at the Conference. These discussions have provided valuable input for the reviews. The Bureau noted that selection of the right topics and high quality of the in-depth review papers is crucial for ensuring a good outcome of a review. It also noted that the in-depth review papers are of great value and should be used more widely.

The document is submitted to the Conference for information.

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I. Background

1. This note was prepared at the request of the Bureau from its February 2013 meeting to describe the in-depth reviews and their outcomes. The note covers the reviews carried out during the period 2007-2013.

2. The in-depth reviews of selected statistical areas are an important tool for achieving the key objectives of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and its Bureau, namely:

(a) To promote close coordination of the statistical activities of international organizations;

(b) To respond to any emerging need for international statistical cooperation.

3. The in-depth reviews allow the Bureau to coordinate international statistical activities in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region. The reviews take stock of current work with the aim of identifying gaps or duplication of work and addressing emerging issues. The reviews are action oriented: the aim of the discussion is to decide on follow-up actions at the international level to address the issues identified by the review.

4. In the past, all statistical areas were reviewed in-depth over a two year cycle (one year economic statistics, the other year social statistics and environment statistics). The reviews were based on rapporteur reports prepared mostly by Eurostat, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or UNECE. The wide coverage and high frequency of reviews resulted in a heavy workload for the organizations concerned, a rather superficial discussion of individual statistical areas, and insufficient attention to the country perspective.

5. Therefore, the in-depth review process was changed during 2005-2006 to make the reviews more efficient and effective. In June 2006, the Conference decided to focus the reviews on high priority statistical areas where considerable work is ongoing or notable gaps exist. The topics should be selected from the 56 statistical areas listed in the Database of International Statistical Activities (DISA) classification of statistical activities, either single topics or ad-hoc groupings of the topics. The topics cover statistical subject areas but also methodologies of data collection and processing, and strategic and managerial issues.

6. In 2006, the Conference also decided that the reviews should focus on strategic issues, be more action oriented and include recommendations for further steps to be taken by the Conference. Starting from 2008 the Bureau has selected one in-depth review topic each year to be discussed at the CES plenary session prior to the discussion at the Bureau meeting to better involve the members of the Conference.

7. The Bureau considered the in-depth review process in February 2012 and adopted recommendations for organizing the reviews, including a template for preparing the papers that provide the basis for discussion (ECE/CES/2012/5). These Recommendations provide a good description of the current in-depth review process. In October 2013, the Bureau asked the Secretariat to update the template for in-depth review papers to recommend that the papers would identify priorities for national statistical offices taking into account their limited resources and analyse key user needs.

8. The annex presents a summary of the outcomes of in-depth reviews undertaken in 2007-2013. The table provides the main conclusion and main outcome for each review, and indicates the type of outcome, such as new work started, on-going work adjusted, tangible output (guidelines and recommendations) prepared, etc. A more detailed description of the

reviews, their outcomes and related initiatives is available at: www.unece.org/stats/ces.html.

II. Outcome and impact of in-depth reviews carried out in 2007-2013

9. The Bureau has reviewed in-depth 24 statistical areas over the last 6 years (2007-2013, approximately three in-depth reviews per year). The final review documents and their outcomes will be made available on the UNECE website[1].

10. The different types of outcomes of the reviews can be grouped as follows:

(a) Launching methodological work under the CES: creation of teams of specialists to develop new guidelines, recommendations, collections of best practices, etc.; adjusting the UNECE work programme in line with the recommendations of the review;

(b) Follow-up undertaken at other fora than the CES;

(c) Identifying a need for action but putting the actions on hold due to the lack of resources in the secretariat and/or countries; the issue is planned to be reviewed again in future;

(d) Increasing cooperation and exchange of information (in addition to identifying specific actions).

A. Launching methodological work

11. In many cases, the in-depth reviews have led to launching new methodological work under CES to address measurement challenges, gaps or lack of harmonization (see column 4 in the annex). For example, as an outcome of recent reviews the Bureau has set up four Task Forces in new areas: global production, measurement of household income, time-use surveys and ageing-related statistics. In other cases, the review has led to preparing new outputs in areas where the secretariat was already active, such as statistical dissemination and communication, or gender statistics (column 5 in the annex).

12. The aim of the work of the Task Forces is to prepare a tangible output, such as guidelines, recommendations, collections of best practices, etc. Nine reports, guidelines or recommendations are expected as an outcome of work resulting from in-depth reviews carried out in 2007-2012 (column 6 in the annex; additional outputs may be prepared in future as a result of some of the reviews undertaken in November 2012 and February 2012). So far, five reports have been finalized:

(a) Canberra Group Handbook on household income statistics, second edition;

(b) Developing gender statistics: A practical tool;

(c) Guide to improving statistical literacy;

(d) Revised Guide to communicating with the media;

(e) Guidelines for harmonizing time use surveys.

13. The following four recommendations or publications are currently being finalized, and are planned to be submitted to the Conference in 2014-2015:

[1] www.unece.org/statshome/areas-of-work/statsarchiveact00e/in-depth-reviews.html

(a) Guidelines on environmental indicators for EECCA countries;

(b) Quality of employment;

(c) Guide on global production;

(d) Ageing-related statistics.

14. In addition, other types of outputs have been prepared as a result of the in-depth reviews, such as:

(a) Wiki knowledge bases on using administrative and secondary sources in official statistics, and for sharing resources and experience in statistical data collection;

(b) Inventory of groups working on information and communication technology statistics.

15. In some cases, the outcome of the review has been a decision to organize a one-off event (seminar) to explore the issues in more detail and to decide whether new methodological work needs to be undertaken. Examples of such seminars are:

(a) CES seminar on measuring population movement and integration in a globalized world (2008);

(b) CES seminar on strategic issues in business statistics (2009);

(c) Joint UNECE, European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) workshops on government and fiscal statistics for EECCA countries in 2011 and 2013;

(d) Seminar on new frontiers for statistical data collection (2012);

(e) Joint UNECE, OECD and Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) seminar on the way forward in poverty measurement (2-4 December 2013).

B. Follow-up activities at other fora than the CES

16. Many outcomes of the in-depth reviews contributed to work at other fora, often to global processes launched by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC). This has been the case, for example with statistics on culture, agriculture, environment, housing and education.

C. Actions put on hold

17. It has happened in a few cases that the in-depth review identifies a need for action but these cannot be undertaken due to other, more urgent priorities and lack of resources. In some cases, the Bureau has put the actions on hold and has decided to come back to the issue after a few years to review whether there is still a need for follow-up.

18. For example, the in-depth review of population statistics in 2007 recommended setting up a Task Force to document best practices in population projections. However, the Task Force was not set up due to lack of interest from countries to participate in this work.

19. As a result of a review of housing statistics in 2009, the secretariat carried out a survey among the CES members to identify priority issues where future work might be undertaken at international level. The survey showed an interest in several topics from housing statistics, and a need for a standard international set of definitions, accounting procedures and guidelines. However, the survey did not identify a clear priority area for

follow-up international work. The Bureau decided to keep housing statistics on the list of follow-up items and come back to the topic in the future.

20. As an outcome of the in-depth review on education statistics in 2012, several countries and international organizations expressed interest in participating in a Task Force on measuring e-lea·ning, and expressed readiness to share good practice in integrating administrative, survey and census data on education. However, no country or organization volunteered to lead either of the two activities. Therefore, the start of these activities was put on hold until a later date.

21. In February 2013, the Bureau reviewed the issues of political and other community activities, including volunteering. The Bureau selected the issue as a possible CES seminar topic. The topic was not selected for CES 2014 seminars, but it will remain on the list of possible future seminar topics.

D. Increasing cooperation and exchange of information

22. Practically all in-depth reviews led to increased cooperation, networking and exchange of information among the Bureau members and with partner organizations, including with the United Nations Statistical Commission, its various working groups, UNECE Policy Committees, International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS), and United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UN CEEA).

III. Conclusions

23. The UNECE review, carried out in 2013 by its member States, acknowledged that "the UNECE Statistics subprogramme, the Conference of European Statisticians and its related subsidiary bodies work in an efficient way, producing concrete results (methodological principles, recommendations, guidelines and databases) in a regular and on-going way that have clear value added for the region and beyond..." The review also concluded that "the subprogramme should continue the good cooperation with partner organizations such as Eurostat, the CIS-STAT, OECD, World Bank and IMF."

24. During the UNECE review, Statistics subprogramme was given as a good example, in particular with respect to the flexible manner of working through Teams of Specialists guided by concrete Terms of Reference, deliverables and sunset clauses. Some direct quotes mentioned include: "the CES has a unique and complementary role"; "the CES is the most important mechanism in statistics regionally and with a global impact"; and "it is not only attended by very high-quality and experienced people but is one of the most active and proactive international statistical forums in the world".

25. In-depth reviews are one of the key elements in ensuring that the work undertaken by CES remains relevant. It allows being proactive in identifying areas that require internationally coordinated development effort. The reviews have highlighted important gaps which can be filled, they have led to methodological work and new guidelines that address common problems in statistics.

26. All reviews carried out in 2007-2013 concluded with concrete recommendations. In twelve cases (55%) the reviews have resulted in starting work under the CES in a new area, or adjusting the on-going UNECE work programme. In nine areas (41%), the work has resulted in preparing guidelines or recommendations (some other tangible outputs can be expected from the reviews that were carried out in 2012-2013). In two cases, a CES

seminar and in two cases an expert level seminar have been organised to discuss the issues in more detail. In three cases (14%), the need for follow-up work was identified but has been postponed due to other priorities and lack of resources.

27. In-depth reviews guide the work of the UNECE secretariat and the international Teams of Specialists to focus on areas of high relevance, and to shift resources to where they are needed most. The work builds on the knowledge and experience of a pool of experts of national statistical offices and international organisations. The choice of the topics to be reviewed has a big impact on the process, as well as the good quality of the papers that are the basis for the discussion and active contributions in the discussion from the Bureau members.

Annex

Summary of the outcomes of the in-depth reviews carried out in 2007-2013

Review topic	Time	Main conclusion and output under CES	Activities under CES				Follow-up at other fora	Work put on hold
			Network started	Ongoing work adjusted	Guidelines, recommendations, etc. prepared	Seminar/ workshop organized		
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1. Business statistics (IMF, Finland, UNSD, UNECE, Eurostat, Canada)	Feb-07	Main conclusion: "Lack of guidelines and coherence; need for a wider vision on the direction in which business statistics should develop" - A small group to prepare an overview of key strategic issues and organize a CES seminar - A 2009 CES seminar on *Strategic issues in business statistics*				X		
2. SDMX initiative (SDMX sponsors)	Feb-07	Main conclusion: "Encouraged organization of capacity building activities and use of existing meetings to spread awareness of SDMX" - UNECE-led work on metadata standards encompasses SDMX, and now falls under the HLG		X				
3. Population statistics (UNECE)	Feb-07	Main conclusion: "Best practices in demographic projections and post-census revisions should be documented; continue the active work in censuses; migration an important issue" - Decided not to establish a Task Force on demographic projections due to lack of participation from countries - 2008 CES seminar on *Measuring population movement and integration in a globalized world*		X		X		X
4. Income, living conditions and poverty (OECD)	Oct-07	Main conclusion: "Good progress towards a definition of household income, but no agreement on the definition of poverty, rather a set of indicators for the purpose" - In 2008, Canada drafted a road map with options for further work - In 2009 Bureau set up a TF to update the *Canberra Group Handbook* (CES endorsed the Handbook in 2011)	X		X			
5. Gender and special population groups (UNECE)	Oct-07	Main conclusion: "Continue the active work on gender and link it with the global initiatives" - CES Manual, *Developing Gender Statistics: A Practical Tool*, in 2010 - In 2010, TF on indicators of gender equality – to CES 2014 for endorsement		X	X			
6. Environment statistics (Eurostat)	Feb-08	Main conclusion: "Coordination has improved, but the main problem is prioritization of activities towards a coherent system of environment statistics" - In 2009, UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy and CES set up a Joint TF on environmental indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, and South-East Europe. - revised *Environmental Indicator Guidelines* – to be published in 2013		X	X			
7. Culture statistics (Finland)	Feb-08	Main conclusion: "Encouraged consultation between CES/UNSC and the UNESCO institute in developing a framework for cultural statistics" - The CES reviewed the *UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics* in 2008 - Eurostat re-launched working group on cultural statistics in 2008					X	

8. Agricultural statistics, incl. forestry and fisheries (Eurostat, United States and Brazil)	Feb-08	Main conclusion: "Better coordination of work is needed, but need to wait for the outcome of the global process in agriculture statistics" - In 2010, the UNSC led process on agricultural statistics started, there was no need to establish a TF under CES					X	
9. Measurement of labour cost (OECD)	Oct-08	Main conclusion: "Many concerns raised in the review paper were being addressed by other international agencies, e.g. ILO and OECD"					X	
10. Housing statistics (Poland)	Feb-09	Main conclusion: "Lack of common definitions, procedures and guidelines hamper the work, several initiatives are undertaken at other fora" - A UNECE survey on housing statistics among CES members to identify areas where work should be undertaken at international level - Bureau decided to consider follow-up work later					X	X
11. Statistical dissemination, communication and publications (Steering Group)	Oct-09	Main conclusion: "Work should be undertaken on statistical literacy in the ongoing work" - In 2012, a *Guide to Improving statistical literacy;* Revised *Guide to communicating with the media*		X	X			
12. Government finance, fiscal and public sector statistics (IMF)	Oct-09	Main conclusion: "Call for more cooperation between international agencies active in government finance statistics, and need for training" - EFTA/IMF/UNECE training workshops in 2011 and 2013				X		
13. The use of secondary and mixed sources for official statistics (UNECE)	Jun-10	Main conclusion: "Sharing information and developing guidelines would be useful as part of ongoing work" - A UNECE Wiki Knowledge Base on the topic - Publication: *Using administrative and secondary sources for official statistics* - Seminar on *New frontiers for statistical data collection* in 2012		X	X	X		
14. Time-use surveys (Germany)	Nov-10	Main conclusion: "Relevance of time-use data and insufficient harmonisation that reduces the value of this expensive and complicated survey" - TF on time-use surveys set up in 2010 - *Guidelines for harmonizing time use surveys* – to CES in 2013 and to Bureau for endorsement in October 2013	X		X			
15. Measuring information society and statistics on science, technology and innovation (Australia)	Nov-10	Main conclusion: "There may be scope for better coordination of the many initiatives and development of a conceptual framework would be useful" - An inventory of the groups working in ICT statistics - In 2011, CES recommended developing a conceptual framework - The need to develop UN standards to measure ICT raised at UNSC			X			
16. Education statistics (Australia)	Nov-11	Main conclusion: "Guidelines are needed for the measurement of e-learning, and good practices should be shared on the integration of different data sources and education statistics produced by various agencies" - Several countries and international organizations expressed interest in taking part but no agency was ready to lead the work - Activities put on hold until a later date						X
17. Global manufacturing (the Netherlands)	Nov-11	Main conclusion: "Practical guidelines for addressing the unresolved issues related to global production in line with the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA) and Balance of Payments Manual are needed" - A TF to develop practical guidelines on global production - *Guidelines on Global Production* – to CES members for consultation in 2014	X		X			

18. Household survey methods (Canada)	Nov-11	Main conclusion: "Household surveys are important building blocks of statistical systems and should be better integrated with other data sources" - The meeting on *New frontiers for statistical data collection* discussed among other topics household surveys		X				
19. Population ageing (UNECE)	Nov-12	Main conclusion: "The availability, accessibility and comparability of statistical data need to be improved to support ageing-related policies" - In 2013, A TF on ageing-related statistics - The final report with an overview of current practices, analysis of data gaps and recommendations for statistical offices – to Bureau in 2014	X		X			
20. Banking, insurance and financial statistics (IMF)	Nov-12	Main conclusion: "Many initiatives exist and are well coordinated, but there would be room for further improvements in the alignment of concepts and methods and strengthening the cooperation between national statistical offices and central banks"					X	
21. Poverty statistics (Ukraine and Eurostat)	Nov-12	Main conclusion: "Addressing poverty measurement is urgent considering the on-going public discussion. There is no forum for solving the lack of common definitions, methodologies and indicators for the monitoring of poverty" - The seminar *The way forward in poverty measurement*, held on 2-4 December 2013 - In 2013, a proposal was made at CES plenary session to consider organising a high-level seminar on poverty measurement in the future	X		tbc	X		
22. Political and other community activities, incl. volunteering (Mexico)	Feb-13	Main conclusion: "These data are increasingly important, yet challenging to measure. Some of the concepts are new and would require precise definitions" - Added to the list of possible CES seminars; not selected for a seminar in 2014	tbc		tbc	tbc		
23. Big Data (Task Team on Big Data)	Oct-13	Main conclusion: "asked the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Statistical Production and Services to take this work forward" - Added to the list of possible CES seminars; not selected for a seminar in 2014		X	tbc	tbc		
24. Entrepreneurship statistics (Eurostat and OECD)	Oct-13	Main conclusion: "The Bureau asked the Task Force on statistical business registers to address the issues related to business registers in the in-depth review paper." - OECD and Eurostat drafted a proposal for possible further work for the next Bureau meeting.		X	tbc	tbc		
Total			5	9	9	5	5	3